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A Resolution Worthy of a Vow

By: James L. Holly, MD

Health has much more to do than simply with blood pressure, heart rate and breaths per minute. Health involves our entire life and particularly our most intimate relationships. Many people have lived a sickly life, the roots of which could be traced to wrong choices in how they enter or practice marriage.

As a New Year begins today, my thoughts turned to New Year's Resolutions. I hate resolutions because I don't know anyone who keeps them. That is why I have encouraged people to make vows instead. In another place, I have contrasted these two and you can read that treatment at www.setma.com under James L. Holly, MD "publications." Suffice it to say here very few people have the strength of will to fulfill abstract resolutions. However vows, which are always made to God, rather than to other men/women, or to one's self, often meet with greater success than do resolutions.

Perhaps the most common vow which men and women make, and one which will have a greater impact on one's health than almost any other, is the marriage vow. In light of the New Year, with the desire to encourage others to make vows and not resolutions, and with a desire to strengthen marriages, I am republishing as this week's Your Life Your Health an open letter I wrote to my son in 1999, just prior to his wedding. A copy of this letter hangs in his home and in my office. From time to time, I re-read it and I encourage him to re-read it. It is my hope that the challenge of this letter helps start and finish your New Year well.

To My Son – June 3, 1999

"It's hard to believe that twenty-six years have passed since you came into our lives. You have gone from being a dependent child to being a dependable colleague. You have brought honor to your family by the manner in which you have conducted yourself and now you have chosen a bride. In a couple of days you will forever change. You will no longer be "me," but "we." Let me share some insights into how to be successful in your marriage.

First, be faithful to your wife. Commonly, we associate this with not being involved with another woman; that is the most extreme example. But, faithfulness also has to do

with delighting in your wife. In the Bible, Job made a covenant with his eyes, and would not look upon a woman other than his wife. Don't compare your wife to other women. Let your wife know that she is your ideal, no matter how she may change. You will injure the spirit of your marriage if your wife knows that you find pleasure in other women, even in just looking. You will delight her when she knows that you have eyes only for her. And, as she knows that you have eyes only for her, the inner beauty, which creates the radiance in her countenance, will grow. It is that beauty, which will sustain you both as you grow old together.

Second, trust your wife. You will discover that your wife will admire you more when she knows what is in your heart and on your mind. Gifts of things will not please her as much as gifts of your dreams, hopes, fears and plans. Remember, Son, bravery is not found in those who have no fear. Bravery is found in those who in the face of fear and uncertainty act on conviction and resolution. Fear will not create insecurity in your wife; compromise will. As she sees that you are a man of conviction, she will be confident of the future regardless of temporary negative circumstances.

Third, be kind to your wife. It is possible to love someone and not be kind to them. Remember, it is not so much what you think she ought to want or to think, as it is what she wants or thinks, which is important. Be slow to respond with angry words, even when you are right. Experience has taught me that it is possible to be right, but not be righteous. Do not condescend your wife, but sometimes it will be important for you not to respond when she needs to express frustration, anger or discontent.

Fourth, be gentle to your wife. Gentleness is really caring more for another person's success than your own. Make it your life's purpose for your wife to be successful – emotionally, physically, spiritually and mentally. Discover what your wife values and work toward providing that for her. You will love your children most by loving your wife.

Fifth, honor your wife. Listen to her. Be interested in hearing her ideas, particularly in the company of others. Do the little things which invest honor in her – open the car door for her, especially in the rain; hold her chair at the table for her; stand when she comes into the room or when she approaches the table; don't interrupt her when she is talking, particularly when others are present. In the presence of other women be attentive to your wife, but do it subtly. Don't spend money, which you do not have on special occasions. Invest yourself in giving to her by providing gifts which you can afford, but which reflect thought and planning.

Sixth, love your wife. For the first time in your life, love now has a physical component. As you are intimate, meet the needs of your wife by being patient and understanding. Remember, your wife is not a toy with which to amuse yourself. She is your life's mate. The investment you make in her self-esteem, self-confidence, self-fulfillment will bring you far more pleasure than anything. Love always puts the needs and the desires of another before one's own. Love your wife by making sure that her needs and desires are met before you ever think about meeting your own. You will love your wife, also, by loving her family.

Seventh, minister to your wife. Because your wife is a Christian, her greatest need is to know that you are a man of faith and conviction. Worship with her, both in a church and in your home. Be spontaneous in sharing your heart and the fruit of your intimacy with God with your wife. Make certain that she knows that you pray for her and that you are led of God in your decisions in life. Nothing will give her a greater sense of peace than knowing that you will not surrender your beliefs for anything or anyone.

Eighth, listen to your wife. Few things will create delight and pleasure in your wife as when she sees that you listen to and heed her counsel. Few things will keep you from making a fool of yourself in life as much as listening to your wife will. There will be many who will approach you with wrong motives. Your wife will often sense this intuitively long before you will. Heed her caution even when she can't explain why she is cautious.

Ninth, counsel with your wife. Don't just listen to your wife; ask for her opinion and ideas. Don't ever keep secrets from your wife. Don't ever let anyone swear you to a confidence in exclusion of your wife. There are some things, which you will not tell your wife; there must never be anything, which you can't tell her. Make sure that before you get anyone else's counsel, get your wife's.

Tenth, enjoy your wife. Spend time with her other than in front of the television. Take rides with her. Walk with her. Talk with her. Sing with her. Listen to music with her. Read with her. Read to her and her to you. Plan time with her. Few things will please your wife as when you schedule time with her and when you will not let anything interfere with that time.

Son, it is a wonderful life, and you can make it more wonderful. You have chosen well, in choosing your bride. Your mother and I believe she has chosen well, also. Now, I challenge and admonish you to do well. God bless you. I love you."

There are other vows which will impact and benefit your health. On this New Year's Day, we must all know this is the first day of the rest of our life. The choices you make today will influence your entire life. And, remember, it is your life and it is your health.